

“Ideality and Reality”

The Body as Social Criticism in Tsushima Yûko’s *Child of Fortune*

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1. Introduction

The novel *Chôji* (hereafter referred to by its English title *Child of Fortune*) was first published in Japan in 1978. The author, Tsushima Yûko (1947-),¹ a contemporary writer of short stories, essays and novels, is said to be one of the best writers of Japanese literature in her generation.² Tsushima Yûko has been known to put an extended focus on the ambiguity of the maternal role in her works as well as dealing with the absence of fatherhood, problems connected to pregnancy, childrearing, and single mothers' conditions. In *Child of Fortune* she depicts a divorced single mother who appears to have difficulties finding her own place within the social conventions of the Japanese society.

In Japan, there is an alleged “myth of motherhood”, which has been under scrutiny for the last decades. There is an image of the Japanese woman as lenient and self-sacrificing towards her children, and firmly devoted to the role of motherhood. Due to the “strictness” of the maternal role in Japan sociologists, anthropologists and writers of literary novels have put focus on this “myth” in various contexts. Psychologist Iwao Sumiko, author of *The Japanese Woman*, a book published in 1990, writes in the chapter “Motherhood and the Home”:

After becoming a mother, a woman's life cycle markers are keyed to the phases of her children's lives rather than her own. Women pursue outside work, hobbies, and leisure activities only as long as they do not threaten the foundations and functions of the family.³

Tsushima Yûko is as already mentioned one of the novelists who draws on the various issues related to motherhood through her literary works. In *Child of Fortune*, she has put focus on a woman who lives a life that deviates from the ostensibly “good mother paradigm”. The story is about a divorced woman in her mid-thirties who experiences an *imagined pregnancy*. This woman already has a 12-year-old daughter who she is not living with. She seems to be directed by her own impulses rather than what is expected of her, and she appears to be struggling against the society's pressure to follow certain conventions. It may therefore be tempting to label her as an agent for feminism and/or non-conformism. However, giving her the label “feminist” is perhaps a little problematic in this context as feminism in itself is a rather extensive concept that is understood in different ways. So instead of giving the

¹ As a general rule, Japanese write their family name prior to their given name, and this custom will also be practiced throughout this thesis.

² Miyoshi Masao, *Off Center. Power and Culture Relations between Japan and the United States* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 212.

³ Iwao Sumiko, *The Japanese Woman* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 125.

protagonist in *Child of Fortune* a “feminist” label, I have decided to call her a woman who may be “challenging the conventions of the society”. Yet at the same time she is struggling against her own emotional turmoil, and the fact that she experiences an imagined pregnancy while being unwilling to comply with the existing maternal ideal also makes the label “non-conformist” somewhat contestable.

The objective of analyzing this novel is connected with two questions that are closely related to one another. First, I would like to look into the meaning of the protagonist’s imagined pregnancy. *Why* does a woman who is seemingly reluctant to adhere to the existing maternal ideal imagine herself pregnant? Is it a result of her unconscious wishful thinking to live like a “woman” that she is not even aware of? Or, is it the “oppressive” *social conventions* that make her body react in such a way independently of her “real” wishes? If the latter is the case, to what extent can her imagined pregnancy be seen as a mean of social criticism? Secondly, I will, in addition to the first question posed, also like to look into the protagonist’s attitude towards the existing female and family ideals. In what ways can she be said to be challenging these?

2. Methodology

In trying to find an answer to why the protagonist in *Child of Fortune* imagines herself pregnant, I will look into the philosophical and feminist discussion that reflects upon the body, gender and sex. In doing so, I will use some of the theories that appear in the works of Toril Moi, and to a lesser degree, in the works of Elizabeth Grosz. The various theories are slightly different, but they are similar in the way that they all hold a critical attitude to what they call *constructed ideals*; ideals that are supposed to account for a person's social position and behaviour. When it comes to the protagonist's attitude towards motherhood and the female and family ideals, I will make references to various theorists, among them sociologist Sugimoto Yoshio and psychologist Iwao Sumiko.

In search for a deeper understanding of the questions related to the complexity of the main character in *Child of Fortune*, it is also important to understand how things work in the Japanese society. Before I proceed with the analysis itself, I will take a brief look at some of the historical elements starting with the Meiji Period (1868-1912), as they are vital for the understanding of how the position of Japanese women and the Japanese “myth of motherhood” came into currency. This will be followed by some explications of the theories I use in the thesis. But before all this I will present a plot summary of *Child of Fortune*.

3. *Child of Fortune* – a Plot Summary

In *Child of Fortune* we meet Kôko Mizuno, a woman in her mid-thirties. She is a divorced mother of a girl, Kayako, who is on the threshold of adolescence. Kôko earns her living as a piano teacher by giving lessons to children every now and then. It is neither a full time position nor a job she is particularly enthusiastic about. She lives alone in an apartment in Tokyo bought for the small inheritance after her mother. Both Kôko's parents are dead, and so is her brother. The only remaining family member Kôko has left is her older sister Shôko.

Kôko's daughter Kayako lives at Shôko's house, which is the two sisters' common childhood home. Kayako visits her mother only once a week, from Saturday evening to Sunday morning. The relationship between Kôko and Kayako is complicated; it is even more problematic than the average relationship between a mother and her adolescent daughter.

Kôko is unconventional in the sense that she fails to behave according to the society's standardized norms and gender roles. She is divorced, she seems indifferent to the existing family ideal, and she drinks quite frequently. Kôko seems to be a woman who is, after giving birth and entering matrimony too early, incapable of dealing with the various demands she is supposed to embrace. Instead she appears to be lapsing into her own "egocentric" needs.

Early in the novel Kôko suspects that she is pregnant again, at the age of thirty-six. As the suspicion grows stronger, feelings of both excitement and discouragement gradually emerge, leaving her with a great deal of anxiety. The pregnancy is a result of a hasty relation with a man named Osada, a friend of both Kôko and her ex-husband Hatanaka. But Kôko's true love interest is her friend Doi who unfortunately happens to be married to someone else. As he has got a family of his own, with two children, he is only with her occasionally, and when the story is being told, it has been three years since they parted. Still after all this time she finds it hard to stop thinking about him.

Kôko's older sister Shôko is married to a prosperous attorney, and they live together with their two children in the two sisters' childhood home. Shôko is perhaps her hardest critic when it comes to her way of living – claiming that Kôko's irresponsible ways are at her daughter's expense. And Kôko is apparently unsteady and flimsy in her way of handling things – does she care sufficiently enough for her daughter Kayako?

There's a sudden turn of events when Kôko discovers that she is pregnant again. Or, she *thinks* she is pregnant. The problems reach a peak when she finds out that her pregnancy is false, and she has to confront herself and come to terms with her life situation.

4. A Historical Overview

4.1 The Meiji Period (1868-1912)

With the Meiji Period Japan entered a new era with a rapid modernization of the country. The Japanese society underwent major changes that affected the political, economic and social areas. The new era also involved enactments that would serve a great impact on Japanese women's lives. With the introduction of the Civil Law Code the *ie*-system was established. *Ie*, which directly translated means “household” or “home”, became the basic social unit of Japanese law. This system was not entirely new as it was partly based on the samurai class' family system that emerged during the Edo Period (1603-1867).

In short, the *ie*-system was a hierarchical structure which consisted of a patriarch and his family members, a structure that often consisted of more than just two generations. The family members were attached to the head of the *ie* either through real or symbolic blood relationship. It was the head of the *ie* who decided its members choice of, among other things, education and marriage partners.

Every *ie* had its own *koseki*, or “family registration”. Full personal information about individuals in each household was kept in the *koseki*, and this information was available to the local municipal authorities as it was considered to be official. When a couple got married they could establish a new *koseki*. For women this meant that when they got married they would become a part of not only their husband's household, but also their *koseki*.

Another major outcome of the Meiji restoration was the “redefinition” of women. The idea was to turn women into “good wives and wise mothers”, also known as the *ryōsai kenbo* concept.⁴ According to Ueno Chizuko, author of the book *Kindai kazoku no seiritsu to shūen* (“The Rise and Fall of the Modern Family”), published in 1995, the Japanese officials constructed both the *ie*- and the *ryōsai kenbo*-concept to promote the nation's political and social needs. Ueno claims that the *ie*-system does not rest on the samurai class' feudal family ideals alone; it is more a modern construction. One of the things she points out is the process in which the *ie*-concept was made. When the Meiji authorities conducted their investigations into the Japanese history in search for ways to build the “new” nation, they chose to look at the way the samurai class (or the upper class) of the Edo period lived and decided to perpetuate the primogeniture system as the common ideal. However, the samurai class only made up ten percent of the population, and among the other social classes the concept of primogeniture was not that important. People who lived in the rural areas had a frequent

⁴ *Ryōsai kenbo* means “good wife, wise mother” in Japanese.

custom of giving their first-born child of the household inheritance, even if the first-born child happened to be a girl. This system was known as the *anekatoku* system.⁵ As the *anekatoku* system was seen as primitive and unsophisticated by the Meiji authorities, they ignored it while they were making the law suggestions. In other words, the *ie*-system, with its patriarchal system and thus embedded male domination, was a concept that was selected by the Meiji authorities as the appropriate ideal.⁶

With the *ie*-ideology the Meiji officials tried to gather all citizens under its modern rule with the emperor as the symbolic father of the nation. The family was inaugurated as the foundation of the state, and filial piety was equated with loyalty to the emperor who became the “father” of all the Japanese individuals in the family-state.⁷

The characteristics attributed to *ryōsai kenbo* became the principles of women’s education in the decades after 1899. Virtues that were stressed were among others submissiveness, modesty and chastity. Women were in addition to this denied access to public participation, and this restriction reinforced women into the area of domesticity. In other words, while women became more or less destined for a life of household labour men became destined for labour outside the home. Yet their common objective was to serve the nation or the “family state”.⁸

4.2 The Pre-war Years

The ideals and the new laws that came into effect during the Meiji period continued to apply. During the 1920s and 1930s the mass women’s organizations, such as the Patriotic Women’s Association and the army-sponsored National Defence Women’s Association grew rapidly. These organizations were largely concerned with women’s duties rather than women’s rights, and they were quite influential. Janet E. Hunter writes in her book *The Emergence of Modern Japan* that these two women’s organizations aim “was the reinforcement of the patriarchal ‘family state’, and both became vehicles for the mobilization of the female population by the state for the purposes of war.”⁹ Along with the rising of militarism women were encouraged to give birth for the sake of a prosperous nation. The number of working women in the

⁵ I have not been able to find a direct translation to this expression, but it means “succession by the first-born daughter”.

⁶ Ueno Chizuko, *Kindai kazoku no seiritsu to shûen* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 69-70.

⁷ Kathleen S. Uno, “The Death of “Good Wife, Wise Mother”?” In *Post-war Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon, 297 (London: University of California Press Ltd., 1993).

⁸ Ibid., 299-300.

⁹ Janet E. Hunter, *The emergence of Modern Japan: An Introductory History since 1853* (Longman: New York, 1989), 145-6.

agricultural sector and the factories were relatively high during these years, but these women were “largely subject to legal and economic control by the males of the household”.¹⁰ In addition, women’s wages were remarkably lower than the men’s wages.

During the war years the number of women in the workforce increased. Women with children had a protected status, but unmarried women without children worked for the sake of the country. They were obliged to join mass organizations, and in 1942 all of the various women’s organizations had merged into one organization under the name “Greater Japan Women’s Association”. Hunter writes that the official women’s organizations were a major element in the “spiritual” mobilization of the female population, and the ideal of Japanese womanhood was built up as the “mother of the nation”.¹¹ She adds that “women were important as the bearer of sons who would fight Japan’s wars”.¹² A further glorification of motherhood and women as motherly figures with emotional support for the “fighting men” became more evident. As a part of the war efforts, the role of motherhood was equated with a woman’s patriotic responsibility, the same way military service was seen as a patriotic duty for men.

4.3 The Post-war Years

After the Second World War, Japan again became subject to major historical changes. With the intervention of the Allied Occupation forces, led by the US, the *ie*-system was formally abolished. The *ryōsai kenbo* concept also disappeared from educational establishments, and the nuclear family system was supposed to replace the *ie*-system. However, the way of thinking that supported the *ie*-tradition still seemed to live on in some areas. This “renewed” family system and the democratic values that were imposed made many people confused, and living up to this new ideal became a challenge for a great number of Japanese families.

Historian Kathleen S. Uno writes that although the state itself decreased their promulgation of “true womanhood”, a transmuted vision of women appeared instead. Thus many of the values connected to the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal continued to affect women’s lives also throughout the post-war era. Women were encouraged to participate in movements that were partly political, but its agenda largely focused on social issues connected to the protection of

¹⁰ Ibid., 146. Hunter also adds that the entertainment industry recruited hundreds of thousands girls into prostitution during these years.

¹¹ Ibid., 148.

¹² Ibid., 149.

children and the responsibility of family life.¹³ Equal rights nonetheless, Uno claims that the pressure upon women to get married and have children rather than pursuing a career of their own has prevailed into the late 1980s.¹⁴ Hunter holds a similar opinion and adds that a woman who establishes her ambitions within the home will be delegated more credibility and acknowledgement than a woman who, for different reasons, decides to pursue a career outside the home. A housewife is in charge of the household economy and she is responsible for her children's education. This gives her a certain amount of power. Some women would certainly be content with such a situation, whereas others would not. Hunter continues to add that to be a "good wife and wise mother" has continued to be expected of the majority of Japanese girls. Women who are dissatisfied with this paradigm, and want to break out of these patterns, will find it difficult to avoid the barriers they meet as social rules are considered to be of great importance.¹⁵ In this way the conservative view on women and their expected gender roles have continued to live on, maybe not as much in the laws or politics, but nonetheless in people's minds and way of thinking.

¹³ Uno, 295.

¹⁴ Ibid., 303.

¹⁵ Hunter, 150- 151.

5. Some Theoretical Approaches

5.1 Contesting Biological Determinism

Toril Moi, author of *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, a book published in 2005, explains in this book that *the term* biological determinism as we know it first appeared in the late nineteenth century. This expression denotes that the human biology, specifically the reproductive cells, penetrates the human organism and affects its behaviour and way of thinking. This conviction has given rise to the idea that our biology should (or already does) ground a justification of our social norms.¹⁶ This is a viewpoint that many feminists and theorists have felt necessary to oppose. Moi presents, in addition to her own philosophical reflections, three different ways in trying to accomplish such a task in *Sex, Gender, and the Body*.

5.2 The Sex/Gender Distinction

Moi's first presentation is the sex/gender distinction that came into view during the 1960s. This distinction emerged as an attempt to contest biological determinism and saw sex as a natural concept and gender as a constructed concept. Since this way of looking at sex and gender was based on these two entities as a binary opposition, the body was seen as a natural and unchangeable state, and gender was seen as a mobile and constructed state. The feminists of the 1960s and 1970s saw "sex" as biological differences and "gender" as the oppressive social norms that bore on those differences.¹⁷ Moi comments that the problem with such a viewpoint is that the concept of body becomes neglected and subordinate to the mind: "Entirely divorced from the mind, the body is perceived as a mere object, subject to the mind's decisions, a blank slate on which gender writes its script".¹⁸

5.3 Poststructuralism

Moi's second presentation incorporates the poststructuralist view on sex and gender. Theorists such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz have not been satisfied with the sex/gender distinction as a binary framework, or with the sex/gender distinction in itself. Consequently they have strived to reach an understanding of what the neglected body really accounts for.

¹⁶ Toril Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body: the student edition of What is a Woman?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15-21.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

Grosz states that “bodies have all the explanatory power of minds.”¹⁹ Grosz reacts to the way the concept of body has been limited to both scientifically and politically regulated manipulations, as it has been regarded “immune” to cultural, social and historical factors. Thus it has remained an “immobile” or “natural” entity. Butler takes a similar stance, and sees “that sex is constructed by gender, or by the same regulatory discourse that produces gender, so that, ultimately, there is no difference between sex and gender; sex turns out to have been gender all along”.²⁰ Judith Butler thus insists that sex, too, is a cultural construct. And if sex is seen as a construct, the sex/gender distinction is *undone* because they are products of the same discursive norms. Butler and Grosz are concerned about undermining the dichotomy of sex as an essentialist category and gender as a constructive category. Gender is seen as a construction, an entity affected by its circumstances. But perhaps sex is a construction *as well*? Maybe sex is, and always was, gender?

5.4 Simone de Beauvoir

The final method Moi presents in her work is Simone de Beauvoir’s perception of “the body”. Beauvoir developed a concept of the body without distinguishing between sex and gender. From her perspective, the belief that lived experience is a key to an understanding of the body is important. Beauvoir acknowledges that there are biological differences between men and women, but she denies that these differences establish a fixed and inevitably reality. Beauvoir also yields an explanation of the body as a *situation*; declaring that when perceived in a situation, the body is deeply connected to a woman’s individuality or subjectivity. As an existentialist she insists that a human being is always in the process of making itself what it is. The subjectivity will always be embodied and the body does not only bear the mark of sex, but also of race, class, history and so on.

Moi have reformulated Beauvoir’s theories in a new way, as she believes that earlier feminists have misunderstood the meaning of her philosophy, and she reads the following in Beauvoir’s statement:

(1) biological facts only take on meaning when they are situated within economic, social, and psychological contexts; (2) biological facts are nevertheless important elements in women’s situation; (3) biological facts alone cannot define a woman; (4) the body alone does not define a woman, on the contrary, she needs to make it her

¹⁹ Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies – toward a corporeal feminism* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1994), vii.

²⁰ Moi, 43.

own, turn it into ‘lived reality’, a process that is always accomplished in interaction with the woman’s socially situated, conscious choices and activities; and (5) biology cannot explain the social subordination of women.²¹

5.5 Notes on the Theories

Since the sex/gender theory as a binary opposition has been challenged by feminists in recent time I will not discuss the views of the early feminists in this thesis. I will focus on the theories developed by the poststructuralists and Beauvoir to yield some suggestions as to why Kôko Mizuno experiences an imagined pregnancy.

Although these theorists appear to have different approaches to the issue, there are also similarities. They all speak in favour of a woman’s lived experience; that race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on contribute to forming a person’s subjectivity. What they have in common is the strong emphasis on the power of what Butler calls the *regulatory discourse* and Beauvoir calls *lived experience*. In other words, the body can be shaped and influenced by the *social conventions*. However, the poststructuralists strive to explain the body exclusively as a discursively constructed entity so that there are no biological facts or differences *independent* of our social and political norms. This is because both sex and gender are constructed by the same regulatory discourse. Beauvoir acknowledges that there *are* biological differences between women and men, but she denies that these differences establish a fixed and inevitable reality. In spite of this difference, their ultimate goal is the same in that they all want to combat biological determinism.

History shows many examples of how women’s difference from, and “inferiority” to men have been explained and justified; by way of biology, religion, or politics. This is not to claim that the Japanese society or the position of women within this society is based on biological determinism as such, but in Japan, a whole new image of “true womanhood” was created, as promulgated through the *ryôsai kenbo* concept. This concept was supposed to be the ideal – and it was meant to apply to *all* women. The criteria that grounded on sexual difference based on the *ryôsai kenbo* ideology gave both women and men a limited set of options as it principally settled household labour for women and outside labour for men. This understanding of sexual difference has in various ways managed to survive, in spite of the revised constitution of 1947 which aim was to ensure equal rights and opportunities for both women and men.

²¹

Ibid., 71.

6. *Child of Fortune* – “The Body”

The protagonist in *Child of Fortune* experiences a false pregnancy, or a *pseudocyesis*.²² This is a rare condition that causes a person to experience the same symptoms as a real pregnancy. It is believed that a pseudocyesis emerges as a result of an underlying psychological cause. The desire for, or fear of pregnancy may trigger pregnancy symptoms. A wish-fulfilment theory or a major depressive order is also believed to be causing symptoms. However, none of these theories are universally accepted.²³

Since the theories regarding this unusual condition are difficult to verify, I shall venture to give a few possible suggestions about Kôko’s situation by using a philosophical approach. The central question is this: *why* does she imagine herself pregnant? If we, in line with the poststructuralists, assume that sex is the same as gender, and that they are controlled by the same regulatory discourse, is Kôko’s body protesting against the “constructed” conditions she feels compelled to live in? Or is it more plausible to approach this issue using Beauvoir’s existentialist point of departure? Beauvoir did not discuss the “sex and gender” issue as such in her works, but she insisted that a woman’s body (or biology) alone was not enough to define her position. Biological facts tend to gain meaning only when they are situated within a historical or social context, and Beauvoir’s concern has been more connected to what humanity has “made” out of the human female.

6.1 Memories from the Past

The first time Kôko suspects that something might be going on is when she discovers that she has put on weight due to an increasing appetite. The weight increase makes her suspect that she is not suffering from ordinary sickness, and she starts thinking. “It had been exactly like this when she had Kayako.”²⁴ This discovery, or suspicion, does not seem to make a big difference to Kôko at first; there are no traces of either enjoyment or worry. Nor are there any traces of wishful thinking; she seems rather unaffected by it. She ignores the dawning suspicion about a possible pregnancy and continues to get on with her everyday life.

²² In modern medicine, *pseudocyesis* is the word used to describe a false pregnancy.

²³ Journal of Family Practice, May, 1990.

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0689/is_n5_v30/ai_9147671 The article also reveals that although pseudocyesis mostly occurs in women, it has occasionally been reported in men as well..!

²⁴ Tsushima Yûko, *Child of Fortune*, trans. by Geraldine Harcourt (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986), 5.

But something *is* happening with her body, and the suspicion grows stronger. Kôko starts wondering as she is looking at her stomach: “Was it her imagination, or had it swollen a bit more? If there is a living thing in here, she thought, it won’t yet have grown as big as a little finger.”²⁵ She approaches the idea of a possible pregnancy very carefully, and she starts recalling what it was like when she was pregnant with Kayako. Then Kôko’s previous experiences gradually emerge by way of her memories. Not only does she recall being pregnant with Kayako, she also remembers the pregnancy she once terminated while she was still in college. The father of that child would have been Doi, a boyfriend she had before she got married to Hatanaka. Back then she decided not to have the baby, for a number of reasons. This time however, she seems to think in a different manner: “Perhaps she needn’t be afraid to have the baby. Until now the very fact of being pregnant had seemed too threatening to think about.”²⁶ But in the next moment she contradicts herself: “Really, at thirty-six! She needed to talk some sense into herself.”²⁷ After all, is she not considered too old to become a mother? She is supposed to be a responsible grown up person. And how would she manage financially? How would she explain the situation to Kayako? Kôko goes through a period where she feels highly ambivalent about the situation she is in; the desire to keep the baby is frequently interrupted by her own uncertainty and fear about having it.

The memories of her former boyfriend Doi firmly appear alongside Kôko’s pregnancy suspicions. Whenever she thinks about him she is stricken with either nostalgia or insecurity, and this time is no exception:

Without noticing, Kôko had begun to retrace the doubt and indecision she had felt when she and Doi were lovers, and to gather them onto this belly of hers, which was not yet outwardly obvious. Her indecision in those days – she could tell now – hadn’t really amounted to indecision at all.²⁸

This way of recollecting the past - comparing the pregnancy with the memories of Doi indicates that there is a connection with Kôko’s ambivalent attitude to both. Her previous experience was problematic, and that is perhaps why she feels insecure about a possible pregnancy this time. Kôko once got pregnant with Doi but decided not to have the baby. Now, years after the abortion, she acknowledges to herself that what happened had nothing to do with indecision. But if indecision failed to be the reason, then why did she terminate the pregnancy? Maybe it was cowardice? For Kôko decided not to have the baby even though

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁶ Ibid., 35.

²⁷ Ibid., 36.

²⁸ Ibid., 36-37.

there were moments where she clearly wanted to have Doi's child: "... as soon as Doi was out of sight the uneasiness would return over her own steady refusal to become pregnant, and she would begin to imagine herself having their child."²⁹

Even *after* she got married to Hatanaka she would continue to fantasize about having Doi's child: "Sometimes, though she knew it was silly, she even wished that Doi were Hatanaka, because then she could have safely had another baby."³⁰ Back then it was perhaps not the idea of having a baby in itself that appealed to her; it was the idea of having a baby with *Doi*. The memories of Doi are quite dominating; he figures as a very strong force in relation to Kôko, something which becomes evident whenever she dwells upon the past.

Doi on the other hand, did not seem to share Kôko's desire for a life together, involving a child. When Kôko at one point suggested to Doi that she wanted to get a pet, his simple, straight reply was this: "-Don't. Knowing you you'd let it die straight off. -"³¹ Kôko decided to reveal what she wished for; having something (or someone) to care for – in the hope that he would share this wish with her. Confronting Doi with a suggestion like this would give her an idea about how he felt about the issue. But Doi, along with so many other people close to her did not seem to entrust Kôko with any nurturing abilities. The attitude Doi held towards her and their relationship left her insecure, and this insecurity made it difficult for Kôko to make any clear decisions regarding their relationship. She acted as if she was waiting – she was putting herself "on hold" in relation to Doi, and waited for *him* to make the decisions.

Doi made a decision, but to Kôko's surprise he decided to marry another woman when she got pregnant. For Kôko it was a great disappointment, but she firmly believed that their marriage was a fraud, simply a result of this other woman's pregnancy:

She believed she understood pretty well, in her own way, how they'd come to live together and how sour it must have turned. And every time she saw them she would be chilled by her own reading of the situation: when would they split up?³²

Kôko believed that Doi married this other woman because she got pregnant; the same way she married Hatanaka because he made her pregnant. This conviction has obviously caused a great deal of frustration in Kôko, and she even blamed Doi for the fact that she entered the

²⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

³¹ Ibid., 28-9.

³² Ibid., 10.

marriage with Hatanaka; a marriage that in the end failed. As Kôko kept thinking to herself: “Since their own state seemed pitifully deformed, she naturally had to feel sorry for the one woman – of several who’d slept with Doi – whose accidental pregnancy had made her his wife.”³³ Kôko, being somewhat unhappy in her own marriage, assumed that the situation was the same in Doi’s household.

The episode that triggered the end of the affair with Doi was his announcement of his wife’s second pregnancy. This happened during one of their many meetings, as Doi decided to enter a drug store to pick up a nutritional supplement for pregnant women. Kôko, who thought he made a joke, was clearly surprised: “- So you’re having another child, are you? - ... – Yes – was the answer, - as a matter of fact we are. I don’t suppose it bothers you, does it? -”³⁴ The word *we* indicates that Doi was actually close to his wife and that he welcomed the idea of a family increase. For Kôko, who saw his marriage as a consequence of his wife’s first pregnancy, it must have come as a shock. And the fact that Doi never expected this to bother her has continued to affect her.

Something changed after Doi let Kôko know that he had another baby on the way. From the moment Kôko found out about this, she seriously started regretting not being the one having his child. Doi’s wife gave birth to his second child, a child Kôko herself obviously wanted to be the bearer of:

If she’d shown just a little more courage that second child would have been her own. Why was her child born into Doi’s household of all places, when she was the one who had clung to Doi’s body in a tangle of desire?³⁵

Kôko blames herself for having been such a coward and for letting the situation go as far as it did. For a long time she is ruled by anger and regret, anger because of the way she handled her relationship by paying too much attention to Doi’s needs, and regret because she decided not to have the baby:

For it was she who’d trampled her relationship with Doi underfoot – under the dirty feet of respectability. Whenever Kôko’s thoughts followed this course, she had to grit her teeth in bitterness at missing the child she might have had.³⁶

³³ Ibid., 40.

³⁴ Ibid., 58.

³⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

³⁶ Ibid., 41.

When she acknowledges to herself that she may have wasted her relationship “under the dirty feet of respectability”, she becomes aware that she could have carried the pregnancy to term if she had ignored the “respectable” conventions and showed the courage to become a single mother. The fear of how Doi might have reacted was no doubt an important factor in her decision making. Given the nature of her relationship with Doi she must have known, deep inside, that he in the end would let her down. His inconsistent behaviour made her feel insecure, and she has the idea in her head that he would leave her, or even blame her had she decided to keep the baby. She has a fantasy where Doi is telling her “it was your own decision, wasn’t it? So don’t rely on other people”.³⁷

Eventually, the anger and regret Kôko have felt for a long time seems to vanish little by little. And afterwards, in one of her many acts of reminiscing, she starts reflecting (rather than regretting): what was it really that Doi had wanted from her? A safe place where he could blow off some steam? Was she just “the other woman” to him?

Though of course she’d been afraid of getting pregnant, perhaps somewhere in her heart she had wanted it as a means of survival. ... She didn’t want to go on living inside the limits of sexual relations with men. ... The only way she could escape the molten lava of her own sexuality had been to conceive and have a baby. ... Giving birth to this baby was the only way to show Doi why she wouldn’t become pregnant during her time with him, and how badly she had wanted to escape the power of sex. To Doi her body must have seemed as safe as mud.³⁸

The conclusion Kôko reaches is important for two reasons. First, she realizes that Doi never took their relationship seriously. Secondly, she finds a way of using the idea of this “pregnancy” as a mean to desexualize herself. She regretted having had the abortion, because she was insecure about how Doi felt about her being pregnant, and she was afraid of losing him. Her lack of confidence, and the power Doi had over her made her make a decision that she later realized was the wrong one. Despite her own feelings she acted the way she thought Doi would have favoured. She must have known that he never intended to stay with her, and she was afraid of having a baby on her own. Now, it is as if she deliberately wants to use her own body against the way her body has been perceived, especially by Doi. He is no longer that important, the importance lies in the sorrow over the baby she lost, and the remorseful state of having made so many wrong decisions. Having a baby with another man (but completely on her own) could perhaps be a way of solving her regrets. Back then she was the

³⁷ Ibid., 38.
³⁸ Ibid., 112.

one suffering under their unequal power balance. But now, three years later, she can do something about it. And she has no intention of projecting the insecurity that governed her in the past on to the new baby she believes to be expecting.

6.2 Loss and Remorse

If one wants to understand the situation Kôko is in it is important to consider her relations to people who are, or have been, close to her. The relationship Kôko holds towards her daughter Kayako is also significant, because it is not until after Kayako moves out and Kôko finds herself alone she starts noticing the pregnancy symptoms. Is it possible that her symptoms are triggered by the “loss” of Kayako?

This is not the first time Kôko feels lonely; she has a long history of being “left”. First her father passed away. Then her beloved brother died. Her mother passed away just a few months before the story takes place. Hatanaka filed for divorce and left her and Kayako. She also “lost” her boyfriend Doi to another woman. The divorce was not that hard to bear; it was worse losing Doi. Kôko finds a way to deal with her losses, but when Kayako moves to her sister Shôko’s house she begins to reflect seriously over her life. She does not want Kayako to move out, but what can she do? On the outside she has accepted that Kayako comes to visit her only once a week, but inside her head she fantasizes about “punishing” Kayako – “as she used to do when she was three or four years old, by taking her food away or sending her outside barefoot.”³⁹ Now Kayako is gone, and the solitude she experiences makes her vulnerable and she is easily captured by sentimental recollection.

Kôko’s nostalgic memories frequently take her back to the time Kayako was little, to a time when Kôko was the one in control. Now Kayako is older, and her decisions and tastes are very different from the way they used to be. Kayako has grown, and as they have dinner she reveals to her mother that she has decided to apply for an expensive and private catholic junior high school, instead of going to a public junior high. Kôko, who wants her daughter to go to a public school, is clearly disappointed by her choice:

if this is what’s meant by growing up, then I wish she hadn’t. Once, baby Kayako used to break into a big, toothless smile at just a glimpse of her mother’s face. Now Kôko was furious with her young self: why hadn’t she tried more greedily to soak up the laughter? If she were going to raise another child, she would cuddle it and nestle its cheek against hers for all she was worth, leaving

³⁹ Ibid., 6.

nothing to regret.⁴⁰

By feeling guilty Kôko acknowledges to herself that she may not have been a perfect mother when Kayako was little, and maybe she secretly blames herself for the fact that Kayako decided to move out. She misses Kayako the way she used to be as a child, and there is something very scary about seeing her growing up. The fear that Kayako may not depend on her anymore is also present. In her many acts of reminiscing with the past, Kôko reveals an abundance of remorse, and this remorse about being a “bad” mother for Kayako can perhaps be restored by her having another baby. However, her already complicated relationship with Kayako fills Kôko with insecurity. Is she really suitable to become a mother once again?

Would another baby – if there were one – look at her with those same eyes? She was gradually noticing her own desire to reminisce with Kayako, oblivious of time. She wanted to indulge herself this way, if only for the moment.⁴¹

Could it be that Kôko feels that she has failed as a mother and maybe unconsciously announces that she wants another chance? Or, maybe she just needs to concentrate on being a “better” mother for Kayako? The fear of having lost Kayako is a frightening thought, because she strongly senses that her daughter is slipping away, and growing more distant “with every moment.”⁴² Again, Kôko comes to think about the past, to the time when Hatanaka took Kayako away to his home town and did not return her until after a week had passed. This episode affected Kôko profoundly. “Once she began to remember, it seemed she’d always been haunted by the fear of having Kayako taken from her.”⁴³ Kayako has not been taken away from her this time, but she has moved in with her aunt and her family out of her own free will.

Kôko’s thoughts about pregnancy and child-rearing indicate that she was indecisive and insecure about how to handle the maternal role in the past. This time she is also questioning herself, and making a clear decision is something she struggles with. However, the fact that Kôko questions her own fear of becoming pregnant indicates that she might be in the process of defeating it. Her past holds a powerful grip on her; again she is torn between two options. The thought of having another baby is frightening, but going through another

⁴⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

⁴² Ibid., 69.

⁴³ Ibid., 70.

abortion is a thought “more wretched than she could bear.”⁴⁴ There is no doubt that Kôko regrets her decisions in the past. Precisely because of her regrets, it may seem as if Kôko wants to have a baby to compensate for her “loss” of Kayako. However, there is no indication that she sees the baby as a *replacement* for her. On the contrary, she has not given up the idea that Kayako will come back home, and she has every intention of including Kayako in her life also after the new baby is born.⁴⁵

6.3 The First Turning Point

The turning point where Kôko finally makes a decision about what to do arrives after she has realized that she does not “want to go on living inside the limits of sexual relations with men”⁴⁶. Up until that moment she has been ridden with conflict – the wanting of the baby and the insecurity about having it has been a major concern for Kôko. However, she chooses to go ahead with her decision. As she is on her way to see a doctor she is thinking:

From now on she would think of nothing but her womb. She would get plenty of sleep, plenty of nourishment, think of names, and prepare baby clothes. This time she wanted to give the baby all the loving she could. This time, there would be no regrets. Just as long as the baby came safely into the world, she didn’t care if she, the mother, were left an empty shell. Her child would feel proud to be alive if he knew how intently his mother had awaited his arrival. She promised him that much, regardless of what kind of future she would be able to give him. He might be born terribly handicapped, but that mustn’t stop him growing up proud. Let him grow up arrogant and ruthless, she thought, with Kayako and me to watch over him. Especially if he’s retarded like my brother. No one is going to force him to live in servile deference to other people’s wishes.⁴⁷

This determination reveals that Kôko has come to terms with her situation, and her attitude to how the society may react towards her is of no importance anymore. It also shows that she is ready to challenge some of the conventions that used to intimidate her in the past – and she wants to prove to her surroundings that she is not afraid of facing the various challenges single motherhood entails. The amount of selflessness she proclaims shows a woman who is prepared to devote herself to the responsibility of motherhood, but unlike before she believes she can be a good mother on her own terms, without any outlined prescriptions.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁵ I shall return to Kôko’s family visions in chapter 7.3 – Marriage and the Family.

⁴⁶ *Child of Fortune*, 112.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 115-16.

Kôko's resolution becomes visible when she is at the hospital waiting to be examined. The doctor examines her, but to her surprise there is no sign of life. Kôko gets impatient: "Barely knowing what she was doing, she flexed and unflexed her abdominal muscles, bent her legs, tried everything that might help."⁴⁸ It is as if she suspects that something is wrong. And it is. The doctors examine her, and they reach a surprising conclusion: "...Not a thing."⁴⁹ It turns out that Kôko is not pregnant after all. Being in a state of both shock and disappointment Kôko now has to confront the inconvenient truth. Her doctors try to comfort her, by offering an explanation of how this could have happened. And after a re-run of tests just to make sure, one of the doctors explains:

The female body, unlike the male, is so intricately and delicately organized that it can only be called mysterious. Almost all women's ailments – menstrual problems, morning sickness, miscarriage, the menopause, and even breast and uterine cancer – are deeply associated with the mind.⁵⁰

In the process of explaining the different diseases and physical conditions that may occur as a result of a psychological disturbance, the doctor suggests that Kôko should consult a specialist in psychiatry in order to deal with her emotions attached to her imagined pregnancy. The doctor offers no clear explanation regarding her condition; he only refers to the female body's "mysteriousness". Why is it so difficult for the doctors to offer a better explanation of her condition? Is it because knowledge about the female body is limited? Or is it because medical science has been too preoccupied with the male body as the "standard" object of scientific research? Explanations that are based on the biological "difference" between the sexes are precarious, because they can easily point to a justification of biological determinism, by indicating that whatever a woman does becomes an expression of her biology (or her sex).

6.4 Towards Recognition

When the truth about Kôko's imagined pregnancy has been verified, she has to deal with it somehow. How does she come to terms with her situation? Kôko ignores the doctors' attempt to calm her down, just as she ignores their various explanations. Kôko bravely decided to keep the baby; she was prepared to go through all the trouble only to find out that there was

⁴⁸ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 120-1.

no baby after all. She returns from the hospital, but everything she does for the next few days is done in a daze. She goes to bed with her clothes on. At first she has problems accepting the truth:

In spite of everything, she couldn't stop lying in a way that favored her stomach. Anything would have been easier to accept. Her whole body burned with humiliation. She could have stood the sight of anything they might have shown her: a fetus like the lungfish in the aquarium, a fetus like a lizard, even a plain lump would have been better than this. Nothing. ... Nothingness was beyond her ability to grasp.⁵¹

Kôko locks herself in; her "loss" leaves her depressed for days. In the process of accepting what has happened she starts reflecting on the reason *why* she imagined herself pregnant.

Eventually, however – for all her efforts to recapture those happy moments from the past – she would have to come to terms with the doctors' judgment. Kôko knew already that there was no way to fight it. She allowed that the pregnancy had been imaginary; that wasn't the problem. What remained beyond belief was that she had brought it on herself.⁵²

Kôko believes that this is her own fault, and she blames herself for it. Blaming herself is something she does quite frequently – and no wonder. She has lived with blame for a long time. "Everyone" has something to blame her for; her daughter, her sister and even her own mother.⁵³ She even blames herself for the death of her father, a man she hardly remembers. "If she'd only been a nicer baby, her father mightn't have had to die."⁵⁴ The feeling of guilt may of course also be a trigger for Kôko's imagined pregnancy.

Eventually, Kôko's appetite goes back to normal, and she discovers that her swelled abdomen is gradually going down. It does not take long before she overcomes the shock: "She was lying on the bottom now, she decided, and there was only one direction from here: toward the surface."⁵⁵ She is thinking about what may have caused this situation, but she cannot find a clear answer to this: "what had she been hoping for in trying to have a baby?"⁵⁶ Kôko keeps reflecting to herself, trying to find the answer. She admits to herself that she may have expected "something" from the baby, but her own understanding of the situation is rather

⁵¹ Ibid., 123.

⁵² Ibid., 129.

⁵³ Examples of how Kôko is subjected to criticism and blame will follow in the next section: "Social Conventions Challenged".

⁵⁴ *Child of Fortune*, 127.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 137.

unclear.⁵⁷

6.5 Some Theoretical Reflections

The issue of Kôko's imagined pregnancy is without doubt a complicated one and difficult to understand. The conflict between Kôko's way of thinking and the way her body reacts contributes to illustrating the awkward situation she is in. Why is it so conflicting? Are bodies perhaps as changeable and apt to cultural influence the same way our minds are said to be? As Elisabeth Grosz claims, it is problematic to see the body as "natural", "pre-historical" and immobile; because bodies act and react.

According to both Butler and Grosz, it is not so that bodies are immobile; it is the *image* that has dominated the concept of bodies that have made them appear that way. It may seem as if Kôko Mizuno has a desire to become a mother to make up for mistakes made in the past. A woman who believes that she is pregnant when she is not can easily become vulnerable to a viewpoint that endorses biological determinism, by claiming that this occurs as a "natural female" reaction – that she deep down has a desire to live like a "real woman" according to "nature". However, the situation is perhaps a little more intricate than this. Is it not possible to say that Kôko's body reacts *against* such a viewpoint rather than on behalf of it? Grosz proposes an interesting explanation to a similar type of question, using the eating disorder *anorexia nervosa* as an illustrating point:

Anorexia is a form of protest at the social meaning of the female body. Rather than seeing it simply as an out-of-control compliance with the current patriarchal ideals of slenderness, it is precisely a renunciation of these "ideals".⁵⁸

Is it not possible then, to say that an imagined pregnancy may have a similar function? Instead of seeing it as a token of the conventional mother role, perhaps it is a rejection of it? Kôko wants to regain control over her own body, not only regarding the pregnancy, but also regarding the status of her sexuality and the way it has been perceived by the men in her life. When Kôko announces to herself that she wants to "escape the molten lava of her own sexuality" she declares, at the same time, that she renounces the existing bodily ideal that she, until then, has been under the influence of. Furthermore, she is not willing "to go on living

⁵⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸ Grosz, 40.

inside the limits of sexual relations with men” – and this is an exact way of declaring independence from the same ideal that she hitherto have felt trapped in. In this way, she manages to protest against two images of the female body, the woman trapped in her own sexuality (or the woman who just wants to have sex – Doi’s view of Kôko), and the conventional mother role. It is clear from her decision that she is ready to take full responsibility of a life as a single mother, without living within the “safety” of a marriage.⁵⁹

From a slightly different angle, it is possible to just look at Kôko Mizuno’s lived experience. She grows up in a society that clearly puts an emphasis on the gendered “feminine” role as well as the maternal role, and this affects her deeply. If there were no “conventions”, or if these conventions were different, perhaps she would have been in another situation? This is not to say that she is a passive victim of the circumstances, but rather to illustrate the point that she is partly formed by the conditions in which she lives. The idea of a “good wife, wise mother” model that so many women aspired to have rather served as a restriction to Kôko. Toril Moi have pointed out that “any given woman will transcend the category of femininity, however it is defined”⁶⁰ Kôko is such a woman. She is also a woman with a great amount of lived experience. This experience has taught her to overcome the fear and ambiguity that used to control her way of thinking and behaviour in the past. She has realized and accepted that she is not the type of woman who can go on living with values that she cannot adhere to.

The different attitude she holds towards pregnancy this time is interesting. She believes she is pregnant, but she does not have any plans of including Osada in the child’s life; she is determined to bring the child up all by herself. Once she overcomes her ambivalence she finds a way to use her body as a mean to “protest” against the patriarchal ideals. There is more to Kôko’s imagined pregnancy than meets the eye. The question why she experiences an imagined pregnancy is fascinating, but equally fascinating is the way she decides to handle the situation. She may appear to be passive and indecisive, but the way she in the end turns this experience to her advantage reveals a strong and resolute character. This is perhaps more outwardly visible in the next section, where I shall argue that Kôko, in her own way, is a woman who challenges the existing conventions of the society.

⁵⁹ Some reflections about Kôko’s attitude towards marriage and family values will follow in chapter 7.3 – Marriage and the Family.

⁶⁰ Moi, 8.

7. *Child of Fortune* – “Social Conventions Challenged”

It is obvious that Kôko Mizuno is a woman who does not act in accordance with the way a “good wife, wise mother” should act. Still she is not the sturdy type who actively opposes the expectations held by her surroundings; her rebellion is rather subtle. How can Kôko, in spite of her outwardly passive behaviour, be said to challenge the existing ideals and conventions of the society?

7.1 Kôko’s Family Relations

Many of Kôko’s earlier childhood memories involve her two-year older retarded brother who died when she was around ten. Being almost the same age they were always together and Kôko remembers him with joy. She used to take on his habits, and he became her childhood hero; the slightly older brother she could look up to, the brother who would protect her from any kind of harm. He was someone who Kôko strongly identified with; “she knew him to be growing inside the same tight shell.”⁶¹ The childhood years spent with him may have contributed to giving her a somewhat unconventional perspective on life and its values – values that are not connected to the “usual” conventions. Kôko is not too concerned about her reputation. The same cannot be said about her older sister Shôko, who seems pretty preoccupied with her façade. Kôko recalls how Shôko did her best to conceal their brother’s existence, but “he had never been a source of shame to Kôko.”⁶² The fact that Shôko never participated in any kind of socialization with their brother may explain why their perspective on things is so different.

Kôko has continued to carry some of her carefree attitudes into adulthood. When she was married she and her ex-husband Hatanaka used to spend money by going to restaurants even though they could not afford it. The fact that he always borrowed money to cover their lavish expenses never bothered her. She thought “that as long as they were having fun it made no difference how much irresponsibility was behind it.”⁶³ As an adult Kôko is still “childish” and “irresponsible”; her way of escaping obligations maintains a certain impression of her as reluctant to be responsible the way a grown-up person is supposed to be. Kôko has realized that she, in her interaction with her brother, came to know “a kind of joy that had nothing to

⁶¹ *Child of Fortune*, 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 61.

do with the intellect.”⁶⁴ (Or “common sense” or behaviour related to what is supposed to be respectable or correct...)

The good memories of her brother are often and vividly recalled upon. He was a person who Kôko felt at ease with when having problems socializing with other kids. Already from an early age did she resist the group-centred norm that is said to govern socialization in Japan; the idea of a commonness that is supposed to replace independence or individualism. The “group-centred norm” is what Iwao Sumiko refers to as *nagare ni mi wo makaseru*, or “to go with the flow”. As Iwao points out, Japanese “develop and maintain a high degree of sensitivity to what their peers and other persons significant in their lives expect them to be and do.”⁶⁵ When Kôko thinks about how she used to be as a child, she realizes that she stood out from the group-centred norm already then:

One way or another she took great pains, for no particular reason, to ensure that people kept their distance. ... The fair-mindedness of everyone at school, their concern that no child should ever be left out, drove her wild.⁶⁶

Kôko cannot be said to go with the flow, something the relationships with her family members also emphasize. When she recalls upon her childhood years she admits to herself that she still hasn’t “changed a thing”.⁶⁷ The degree of solitude that she experienced as a child has still prevailed.

Kôko’s brother was no doubt an important force in Kôko’s life; he never held any expectations towards her. The same cannot be said about her remaining family members. Her older sister Shôko is also an important factor in relation to Kôko, but in a different way. One might say that she represents the complete opposite of Kôko, as she very much takes pride in her success as a full-time housewife administrating her own household. Her husband is a lawyer, and being the busy outside worker he hardly figures in the story at all, he is only briefly mentioned.

Shôko has a frequent habit of criticising Kôko for not being responsible enough. Her criticism is particularly directed at Kôko’s way of raising her daughter. Shôko has suggested that Kôko and Kayako should both come and live in her house, as a part of their family. Kôko does not want to move, she is happy living on her own. When Kôko continuously ignores this

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁵ Iwao, 9.

⁶⁶ *Child of Fortune*, 119.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 119.

offer, Shôko sees her rejection as obstinacy, and she reacts by saying that Kôko should not entangle Kayako in her “own stubborn pride”⁶⁸ When Shôko realizes that she is not getting any way with Kôko on her own she starts criticising her by way of Kayako. This, of course, complicates the relationship between Kôko and Kayako. Kayako is very sensitive regarding her mother’s “unusual” habits. In one of the scenes that unfold she finds out that Kôko only changes the bath water once a week, and she gets very upset: “Oh, *Mom!* You’re so dirty! When I told them that you only heat the bath once in three days and only change the water once a week, everyone was horrified!”⁶⁹ Kayako sees this “flaw” as an opportunity to denounce her mother, and suggests that Kôko should make an effort to look nicer, or more “feminine”, as opposed to how she usually looks. She continues to tell her mother that she can look really pretty when she tries, and that she usually looks “just like a man”.⁷⁰

On the outside, Kôko appears to take this criticism lightly. On the inside, however, she is concerned, and maybe even a little bit angry, about how her daughter is developing. Yet she has problems figuring out how to deal with Kayako:

Kôko had visions of tying her to the desk legs with a good stout rope. Why couldn’t she be satisfied with a public junior high? Why does she fall for lace frills? Accepted? If she really is accepted, then what happens? It’s one thing to buy her a dress, but quite another to keep up the school fees.⁷¹

Kôko knows, given their family background, that the idea of letting Kayako study at an expensive private school is not a good idea. Perhaps Kôko wants to protect her daughter from becoming subject to the social stigmatization she suspects may occur? Or perhaps she simply wants Kayako to be satisfied with the life she can give her, without pretending to keep up appearances? However, talking to Kayako about her choice of school is useless, and Kayako ends up applying for admission to the conservative catholic girls’ school that her aunt has recommended.

It is a source of anxiety to Kôko that Kayako is growing up to become a young woman who is heavily influenced by her aunt. This, in addition to Shôko’s disclosed criticism, is an important reason why the mother-daughter relationship has become more and more dysfunctional. Shôko uses Kayako in letting Kôko know how irresponsible she is, not only as

⁶⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁷¹ Ibid., 26.

a person, but also as a mother. Kayako conveys her aunt's words during one of her weekly visits: "She said we can't let your mother out of our sight or there's no telling what she'll get up to next."⁷² Kayako's perception of what is correct behaviour, and Kôko's "lack of values" makes Kayako think that she has reasons to be ashamed of her mother who is clearly "out of the ordinary".

7.2 The Task of Parenting

Something happens when Kôko's daughter Kayako moves out of her mother's house and in with her aunt and her family. Shôko plays a major role in Kayako's life; she acts as a caring mother, and she gives Kayako a feeling of being protected. Kayako has been living with her aunt for two months, and she gets clothes, books and other presents from her. Kayako is not responsible for any of the household chores in her aunt's house; these are solely taken care of by Shôko herself. This is what Kayako tells her mother during one of her weekly visits:

-At Auntie's they don't make the children do all the stuff you make me do, Mom. When I told them how I clear up after dinner, and wash and iron my own things, and even sew on buttons, they were sorry for me. I was so embarrassed.⁷³

Shôko acts like the "perfect mother", and she invests a lot of time, not only in her own children, but also in Kayako. Kôko, on the other hand, lets Kayako do the housework, a task she ideally should be in charge of herself. When Kayako was little, Kôko used to leave her with Shôko's family from time to time, but as she grew older she became reluctant to do so.

Kôko was in fact proud of the way she and her daughter lived in their apartment – with no frills, and entirely on her own earnings – and she wanted Kayako to share that pride; but the cousins in their setting made a too-perfect picture.⁷⁴

In fear of Kayako becoming like her aunt and her cousins Kôko tried to protect Kayako by raising her according to her own beliefs, but as Kayako grew older it became harder and harder to do so. The way Kôko thinks about the situation reveals that she is reluctant just to the idea that Kayako develops: "Kôko's pleasure was mixed as she watched Kayako display

⁷² Ibid., 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

more intelligence each day.”⁷⁵ For Kôko it is painful to see how her daughter gradually slips away from her childlike and innocent behaviour. When Kôko at one point asks for Kayako’s opinion, Kayako just nods as if she does not really mean anything, or as if to be polite, and “Kôko noted with something of a shock that she’d turned into an altogether agreeable young girl.”⁷⁶

Kôko wants to talk some “sense” into Kayako, especially regarding her choice of education. How can she convince her that she may be making the wrong choice by applying for the private catholic school? However, the words remain firmly in her head. A part of her is afraid of losing her, so she never corrects Kayako or reveals any strong opinions about how she really feels. Shôko, on the other hand, is deeply concerned about her children’s educational matters. She is what may be referred to as a typical *kyôiku mama*. This expression means “the education mother” and it has been attributed to women who devote themselves to their children’s education. Education is an extremely important matter in Japan, and supervising her children’s education is said to occupy a big part of the maternal role.⁷⁷ Shôko is a strong woman who advocates a rather conservative viewpoint also in this regard. During a conversation with Kôko about her own children’s future she comments on her son’s “uselessness”, saying that there is not much hope that he will take over the family law practice. Ideally, she wants her son to be the one who takes over, but since that is unlikely to happen, she has to admit that perhaps that task should be left to her daughter Miho instead. When Kôko comments that a female lawyer would be something, Shôko humorously replies: “–Oh, no! Nothing as high-flown as that. I’m talking about taking her husband into the family as heir.”⁷⁸ Adoption in Japan has historically been conducted for the purpose of bringing the heritage or the professional enterprise of the household forward. If there is no male heir in the household, the man who is married to the household daughter may be adopted for the purpose of bringing the family enterprise forward.⁷⁹ The fact that Miho, who actually does quite well at school, could be able to run a family law practice appears to be irrelevant. For Shôko it is not even considered as an option – she does not seem to have any other ambitions on behalf of her daughter than to see her well married.

Shôko is also interfering with Kayako’s education, and she strives to teach Kayako refinement through cultivating her taste; teaching her about the traditional tea-ceremony is

⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁷ Iwao, 140.

⁷⁸ *Child of Fortune*, 31.

⁷⁹ *Kodansha encyclopaedia of Japan*, vol. 1, 14-15.

one example. She gets introduced to the classics under her aunt's surveillance, and Kayako gradually develops the taste of a well brought up upper class girl. This leads to Kayako's decision about going to the private catholic school that her aunt picks out for her. For Kôko it is hard to see Kayako being caught up in their conventions. Kayako is by far too young to think about marriage, but she clearly adapts to the conservative preferences championed by her aunt, who wants to educate Kayako to sophistication. Iwao writes that many of the young women in Japan are often caught up in the idea of a fairy-tale wedding with a handsome husband coming from a respectable background:

Accustomed to dependence on their mothers, as well as to affluence and a protective environment, they have little experience of the real difficulties or complexities of life and little confidence in their own ability to cope with obstacles; these young women pursue an ideal of happiness largely made up of surface images.⁸⁰

Shôko holds the same ambitions for Kayako as she holds for Miho; seeing her married to a prosperous man. Educating the two girls to refinement will prepare them so that they in the end can find a suitable husband. Kôko is concerned about how Kayako is developing, but she does not reveal any concrete ambitions on behalf of her daughter. It is clear though, that Kôko wants to raise her daughter in a style that differs radically from that of her sister. This is another significant difference between the two sisters; one of them is clearly in favour of the conservative way, the other one wants to raise her daughter in a more independent fashion.

The issues connected to how a woman is expected to behave as a mother are important in *Child of Fortune*. Kôko's relation to Kayako is difficult, and Kôko's relation to her own mother was also a bit of a struggle sometimes: "As a child, Kôko had feared and hated this mother who never relaxed her guard."⁸¹ Maybe Kôko is trying to avoid becoming like her own strict mother by raising Kayako in a different manner? There is a gap between the women of the pre-war generation and the women of the post-war generation. *Ryôsai kenbo* was the official ideal before World War II, and a woman's work had nothing to do with her personal actualization or fulfilment. On this Iwao writes that if a woman's expectations of her husband would go on unfulfilled, she would transfer her expectations on to her children.⁸² It is hard to say whether Kôko's mother, who grew up with pre-war values, got her expectations by her husband fulfilled, but she seemed to have had some expectations towards her two

⁸⁰ Iwao, 60.

⁸¹ *Child of Fortune*, 59.

⁸² Iwao, 20.

daughters. She regretted not teaching Kôko properly about household chores; instead she introduced her to the arts and let her take piano lessons. But she saw a hope in making up for this “mistake” by way of Kayako, and she was far from impressed with the way Kôko handled the maternal role. She criticized her for not making the nappies herself and for not breastfeeding:

Kôko recalled what the girl’s grandmother had often said: she had no special ambitions for Kayako, all she asked was that she turn out to be the kind of girl who could put her heart into the cooking and the washing. –It was a sad mistake putting your schoolwork and piano first and letting you off the housework completely. It meant you simply turned up your nose at housekeeping. You can’t entirely blame your husband.-⁸³

By saying this she indicated that the divorce was equally Kôko’s own fault as she failed to play the part as mother and wife out properly. She also criticised her own effort to encourage Kôko to give priority to education and the piano lessons – by referring to her own decisions as “mistakes”.

Kôko grew up with values that were imposed by the revised 1947 Constitution. Some of the first generation of post-war women grew up with different values and a sense that sexual equality was important. These women saw their husbands not only as breadwinners, but also as friends.⁸⁴ Kôko and Hatanaka had a marriage that was largely built on friendship, though initiated by Kôko’s pregnancy.

Kôko’s own father was frequently absent, and he never spent much time with his own family, so Kôko did not really get to know her father. She knows, however, that he had an affair with another woman. He actually died while being with this woman. She is not sure how much Shôko recalls, but “in junior high she did sometimes ask her sister, but though Shôko was seven years older her memory of it all seemed hazy, too.”⁸⁵ Even if Shôko remembered her father, the memories may not have been all that pleasant. The absence of their father may have affected the two sisters in different ways. Shôko makes every effort in making the “perfect nuclear family” while Kôko does not seem to believe in such a concept.

⁸³ *Child of Fortune*, 19.

⁸⁴ Iwao, 21.

⁸⁵ *Child of Fortune*, 147.

7.3 Marriage and the Family

Both Kôko's and Doi's marriages were results of relations that led to pregnancy, which in turn led to marriage. Kôko did not handle marriage and the maternal role the expected way, and her ex-husband Hatanaka used to say that she was not giving enough energy into being a mother. Kôko herself feels that it all changed when they got divorced. It strikes Kôko that maybe they became better parents after they parted: "It was only after Hatanaka moved out, and Kôko found a new apartment and began taking care of Kayako on her own, that genuine fatherly and motherly feelings had sprung up in them for the first time."⁸⁶ In other words, one does not need to live within a common nuclear family to lead a healthy or happy family life, something Kôko has long come to realize, looking at her failed marriage. Kôko does not need to be married to be content, she is at ease with living alone. She is not too fond of the marriage concept, but she does not reject the concept of *family*. She envisions a family situation involving three members; herself, her daughter Kayako and the baby she believes she expects: "Three people. Kôko was strongly attracted by the number's stability. ... A triangle: a full, beautiful form."⁸⁷ Nowhere in this family triangle is the idea of a father or husband mentioned. Kôko's idealistic way of looking at the family is not only an alternative to the *ie*-structure, but also an alternative to the idealized nuclear family-system that was imposed to replace the *ie*-system.⁸⁸ Kôko therefore appears to believe in a happy family life in terms of her own family values; values that are not necessarily outlined by the society.

As a divorced single mother, most of the parental responsibility falls on Kôko. Hatanaka figures vaguely in his daughters' life, and they have hardly met over the last years. He sends her birthday presents by way of Osada, but those presents are probably not the kind a girl Kayako's age would prefer. It is as if he has no idea of how old Kayako really is, or he is simply too self-centred to really pay any attention. All of the responsibility falls on Kôko. In spite of Hatanaka's absence, Shôko scolds her for not being attentive enough: "...I hope this makes you think about what's best for Kayako for a change. Kaya's lonely. She's got no father, and *you* care more about your own feelings than Kaya's."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Kayako has a father, even if Shôko fails to see it that way. She lays the entire blame on Kôko. The fact that it was Hatanaka who turned his back on his wife and child seems to have slipped everyone's

⁸⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁸ Megan McKinlay, *Unstable Mothers. Redefining Motherhood in Contemporary Japan*. URL: <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue7/mckinlay.html> The idea of the family triangle that Kôko envisions has been found in this article.

⁸⁹ *Child of Fortune*, 67.

mind. Hatanaka's reason for claiming a divorce was vague – he had to make “a fresh start”. His reflections about marriage and parenthood would perhaps not be so strange if it was not for the fact that it only applied to him: no one questions or judges his reasons for pursuing his own ways at the expense of his family. For Kôko the situation is quite another. Her mother's words: “You can't entirely blame your husband”, indicate that she, too, held Kôko responsible for the fact that their marriage failed.

As earlier mentioned, a couple can establish a new *koseki*, or family register when they get married. The *koseki* is considered to be an extremely important document, and whenever a person applies for a school entrance or a job in a firm he or she has to display their *koseki* on request. The *koseki* contains detailed information about individuals regarding their background and household status, including such things as divorce, adoption and children born out of wedlock. Kôko is divorced, and she has her daughter registered in her *koseki*. When Kayako applies for admission to the private catholic school her aunt has selected, she has to hand in a copy of her *koseki*. Sugimoto Yoshio writes in his book *The Japanese Society* that children of divorced parents who belong to their mothers' *koseki* risk a higher social stigmatization than children who come from a non-divorced household.⁹⁰ For this reason, it is possible that Kôko might think that Kayako will be better off in a public school where the children would come from a more diverse background. This suspicion of Kôko's gets verified when the day of the school interview arrives. The criticism Kôko faces when they are at the entrance exam interview, illustrates how important a respectable background is, at least if one wants to get admitted into a respectable sphere. And Kôko with her divorced background is anything but “respectable”. Kayako is worried about her *koseki* information, because she has heard about people who have been rejected school admission due to their home background. She expresses her concern to her mother. Kôko's simple reply to Kayako's concern is this: “If that's what's worrying you, we aren't doing anything especially wrong, so why not simply tell them the facts?”⁹¹ For Kôko it is not a big deal, because she is not feeling guilty over the way they live. Expectedly, Kayako gets denied admission to the school. Although it is not obvious, it is quite plausible to conclude that it is not necessarily Kayako's exam result that refuses her admission to this school, more likely she fails due to the information in her *koseki*, which reveals her family situation. The kind of academic ability Kayako might possess is simply not that relevant.

⁹⁰ Sugimoto Yoshio, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 150.

⁹¹ *Child of Fortune*, 32.

The *koseki* system has been one of the effective means of maintaining the family structure precisely because the information in it is so personal and revealing. A woman who would care more about her child's reputation might be more apt to endure a bad marriage if it could prevent her child from being rejected school admittance, and thus the shame connected to it. Kôko is clearly not bothered about her situation as a single parent, so she cannot see anything "wrong" with it. Kôko may not be challenging the *koseki* custom in a direct way – but she is at least brave enough to ignore the power of it.

Kôko, given her negative experiences, reflects upon marriage with aversion. Her own marriage failed, and from what she vaguely recalls, her parent's marriage was probably not a happy one either. This awareness is awoken by the memories that come to her mind one day she is walking through the park of her old university. She recalls the student days with all the student demonstrations when some of the students threw stones in order to manifest their beliefs. Kôko herself was never involved in any such action, but now, years after, she discovers that "... in its place she'd felt a bond, a fellow feeling. For Kôko believed that she too was throwing stones, in her own way."⁹² She does not demonstrate in a very visible way, nor does she violently rebel against anything; her rebellion is quiet. Kôko's stone is her non-conformity, her struggle against the others. "Rejecting Hatanaka was Kôko's stone."⁹³ Not only did she reject Hatanaka; she also rejects the concept of marriage, the nuclear family, the self-sacrificial maternal role and the gendered "feminine" role.

7.4 The Second Turning Point

Kôko is a person who seems to avoid conflicts. There are few scenes where she actively confronts people. She has disputes with her sister and her daughter that do not lead to any solutions – the problems are left unsolved. However, there is one episode where Kôko reveals her anger, and where she displays having a very strong mind of her own. When the news of Kôko's false pregnancy has been known, her ex-husband Hatanaka and Osada come up with a proposal. They choose a nice setting by inviting her to a restaurant as they believe that she might be suffering from misery due to her experience. They have discussed a suggestion that they believe might be of consolation to her. The suggestion is that Osada marries Kôko and adopts Kayako. This is a solution which according to the two men will serve as the best one for all parts. It becomes clear to Kôko when she enters the restaurant that this is a matter the

⁹² Ibid., 141.
⁹³ Ibid., 141.

two men have discussed for a while, without her presence. The way they behave, by not addressing themselves directly to her when they speak about things that concerns her, provoke her. Kôko is furious because of the way they have discussed the matter behind her back, but she decides to restrain herself. But then Osada drops the fatal statement:

And you know, Hatanaka said something really helpful: it's true that the parent-child bond is absolute in biological terms, but in social terms it's more relative. And, uh, then he said that the relation between the parents, which forms the child's environment, is a contractual agreement based on their mutual wishes, and they both have the right – and the duty – to seek a more ideal relationship. Which means that if they renounce their right to choose, and with it the chance of giving the child a better environment, then they stand to lose their self-respect. ... The point is that Hatanaka has no objection to my acting as Kaya's father.⁹⁴

Kôko gets even angrier after hearing this, and their suggestion puts everything in a new perspective. What they themselves may regard as a “noble” offer is nothing less than an insult to her. This incident makes Kôko realize that she is often considered to be incapable of managing her own affairs. The attitude the two men reveal also shows that although the *ie*-system was officially abolished after World War II and supposedly replaced with nuclear family values, the attitudes around marriage and family life still bear the evidence of patriarchal thinking. It is obvious that the “freedom to seek a more ideal relationship” applies more to Hatanaka – Kôko's opinion has been totally ignored even though she is one of the affected parts. The episode in the restaurant is the turning point that finally gets her up and makes her speak her mind. Their overbearing, authoritative attitude; the way she is supposed to feel relief as they come to her “rescue” with their marriage proposal, gets her very angry. The idea that marriage again shall come to her rescue, is a proposal Kôko needs to reject. This episode makes her understand how misunderstood she has always been. When she leaves them, Osada tries to follow her while he is shouting: “How much longer are you going to put on this act? You're not fooling anyone, you know.”⁹⁵ However, Kôko ignores his attempt to stop her; she is done with being patronized and regarded as stubborn and irrational.

Unlike the other female characters in the novel, Kôko does not concur with the conventions – her thoughts about what a happy family life may seem like is different from theirs. Her sister Shôko's life extension does not only include her own family, she is also trying to take Kôko and Kayako into their family sphere. Women in Japan have often found

⁹⁴ Ibid., 156.
⁹⁵ Ibid., 159.

themselves responsible for covering up family problems, and Shôko sees it as her duty to be responsible for their family's "social problem" Kôko.

Placing Shôko in a contrasting position to Kôko contributes to illustrating a critique of the fixed idea of what a woman is or should be. Kôko lives with a certain pressure to behave according to particular norms. But no matter how a woman is categorized, what kind of "feminine" qualities she is supposed to embody; there will always be someone who transcends this ideal. Kôko does not seem to know what she wants in life, and her struggle for self-realization is therefore complicated. She is nevertheless clear about what she does not want. Kôko does not betray herself, and she comes to this recognition as she realizes: "All my life, though often I haven't known which way to turn, I *have* managed to make choices of my own."⁹⁶

The end does not provide the reader with any particular solution to Kôko's problems. There is no "happy" or definite ending. Some problems have been exposed, and Kôko reveals that she has long overcome the fear of becoming judged according to her chosen lifestyle. She insists on doing things her own way even if she knows that "giving in" may prevent some of the social criticism that is being directed at her. She has her own ways of protesting against her critics, not only the men in her life, but also the women close to her. It is actually the women who criticise her the most; her mother, her sister and even her own daughter all think that Kôko behaves in ways that are "unfeminine", unsuitable and irresponsible.

When Kôko in the end walks away from the two men in the restaurant she has no clear prospects as to where she is going. Not knowing what lies ahead of her, she is "rubbing her eyes" and "walking along the faintly tinged pavement."⁹⁷ Taking those first steps into an uncertain future is perhaps a better alternative for Kôko than walking back to what might be a safer, but impossible and confined destiny.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 161.

8. Concluding Remarks

Child of Fortune is a work of fiction that was written and published in the late 1970s. Despite the fact that the action in the novel takes place more than a century after the Meiji restoration, the understanding of the gender roles that bear on “sexual difference” has in various ways managed to survive. Even though the revised constitution of 1947 ensured equal rights for women regarding, among other things, inheritance and education, some of the characteristics associated with the “good wife, wise mother” ideology have continued to serve as an ideal for innumerable women in Japan. The protagonist in *Child of Fortune*, Kôko Mizuno, also has to relate to this ideal. The various problems she faces when she refuses to do so become visible through the complicated relationships she holds with her sister, her daughter and the men in her life.

Kôko is not a woman who is willing to handle the maternal role the way one “is supposed to”, and therefore it comes as a big surprise when she experiences an *imagined pregnancy*. Why does a woman who is so reluctant to comply with the existing maternal ideal end up in such a “contradictory” situation? It is obviously not easy to yield one explanation to such a complicated question, but it is possible to yield some suggestions. If one, in line with the poststructuralists, assumes that sex is the same as gender, or that both entities are driven by the same regulatory discourse, one can argue that it is the “oppressive” social conventions that make her body react the way it does. Kôko is a woman who displays a considerable amount of ambiguity regarding the many choices she faces, and her body acts with the same ambivalence as her social behaviour and way of thinking. Since there is one discourse that controls both her body and her mind, both entities react, but not necessarily in the same way, and that is why they appear to be in conflict with each other.

If one decides to approach the question from Beauvoir’s perspective lived experience and the explanation of the body as a situation become important factors. The reason why Kôko imagines herself pregnant may also be a result of her previous experiences, especially those connected to her family members and lovers. While she was still a college student she had an abortion, and terminating the pregnancy is something she has carried on regretting. When she believes that she might be pregnant again she decides, after some consideration, to be courageous and keep the baby, regardless of how people around her might react. Simone de Beauvoir insisted that a woman is always in the process of making herself what she is. Kôko is a woman whose character and resolution develops throughout the story. From being a

young woman ridden with insecurity, she learns how to learn from her experiences, and by doing so she gradually builds up her self-confidence.

However, the lived experience that Beauvoir refers to can also be seen as a part of the regulatory discourse that the poststructuralists refer to. It is therefore possible to apply the theoretical aspects of both the poststructuralists and Beauvoir in this context. Kôko's body (as well as her behaviour) is as much influenced by her own experiences as by the regulatory discourse.

Kôko is definitely not a rebel in the typical understanding of the word, but her sense of difference, or attraction to what may be regarded as different, bears the evidence of a woman who does not agree to put forward the common ideals of family and motherhood as an object of desire, unlike her older sister Shôko. When Kôko towards the end of the story ignores Osada's and Hatanaka's marriage proposal she rejects the patriarchal authority and the conventions she has been in conflict with for such a long time. Prior to this episode she has passively distanced herself from the same conventions rather than actively confronted them. Despite her outwardly passive behaviour, she has shown that she has no desire to live like a "good wife" or "wise mother".

Times have undoubtedly changed in the thirty years since *Child of Fortune* was published. It may be that women in today's Japan have a greater freedom of choice regarding individual lifestyle than the women in 1970s Japan. In recent years an increased number of women have deliberately postponed marriage and having children, and as a result, the Japanese society is currently facing difficulties regarding a steadily declining birth rate. This is causing the politicians great worry, and in January 2007, at a local political meeting, former health minister Yanagisawa Hakuo proclaimed that Japanese women should do their best to produce children in order to challenge the declining birth rate. He further said that since "the number of birth-giving machines and devices is fixed, all we can ask for is for them to do their best per head."⁹⁸ Although Yanagisawa later added that it was probably inappropriate calling the Japanese women "machines", the attitudes and image of women as child-bearers in accordance to state needs are still at work. Maybe these "old-fashioned" values attributed to women are more present than what meets the eye, even today?

Modern intellectuals, like Moi, Butler, Grosz and Beauvoir, all have an important aspect in common. That is to counter the images of womanhood that reduce women to their biological stature. There are of course people who would claim that defining a woman's

⁹⁸ BBC news online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6306685.stm>

position in accordance with her biology is not necessarily meant to be repressive or subordinate, but that is beside the point. The point is rather that no matter how a woman – or a woman's place – is being defined, what qualities a woman ideally embodies, there will always be someone who goes beyond these ideals and seeks their own ideal lifestyle. Living with ideals can be very challenging if these ideals are difficult to attain. But *real* women exist, sometimes in the shadow of the *ideal* ones. The protagonist in *Child of Fortune*, Kôko Mizuno, gives voice to a woman who falls through the official picture of the maternity and gender role prescriptions; she is clearly troubled about the way she is expected to handle these roles. Although *Child of Fortune* is a work of fiction it is important to stress the fact that literature reflects the society, however intricate this relationship might be. As a reflection, *Child of Fortune* contains a great deal of social criticism as it puts focus on the way constructed ideals are being imposed on people – and what kind of consequences it entails for the *individual* in such a situation.

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the Japanese novel *Child of Fortune* (*Chôji*) that was written and published in the late 1970s. The author Tsushima Yûko is relatively unknown to the Western public although she is considered to be one of the more important writers of contemporary Japanese literature. Tsushima Yûko often writes about Japanese women's situation, and she is particularly concerned about issues connected to single motherhood, problems related to pregnancy and child rearing, and the "absent father". In Japan, there is a "myth of motherhood" which has been under scrutiny for the last decades. This myth has partly emerged as a result of the "good wife and wise mother" ideal (also known as the *ryôsai kenbo* concept) that came into view during the Meiji period (1868-1912). As the expression denotes, women are supposed to devote themselves to labour within the domestic sphere. The characteristics attributed to this ideal have in various ways managed to survive, and women in Japan are to a certain extent still expected to become "good wives" and "wise mothers". *Child of Fortune* tells the story about a divorced single mother who has problems adhering to the expectations connected to this ideal. But in spite of her reluctance to comply with the maternal ideal she manages to imagine herself pregnant. The central question of the analysis is concerned with *why* the protagonist experiences an imagined pregnancy and what kind of function it serves. I approach this question by referring to the feminist and philosophical discussion about gender, sex and the body, the way it appears in the works of Toril Moi and Elizabeth Grosz. One of the main concerns of these theorists have been to counter the image of "true womanhood" that is grounded on biological determinism by yielding some explications to what "gender", "sex", and "the body" really accounts for. By using their theoretical reflections I have tried to show in what ways "the body" may serve as a mean of social criticism. I also propose examples to how the protagonist's behaviour, however passive and inconsistent it may appear to be, is an expression of social dissent rather than being in agreement with the social conventions.